No. 57

The REDEMPTION of Marie Gordon

THE TRAGIC STORY OF WRONGED WOMANHOOD

Price 10¢

"Listen, Harold," she said very quietly. "Don't make yourself unhappy by this unreasonable jealousy. I have not yet given you the least reason to distrust me, have I?"

R. of M. G., No. 57.

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VICTOR TALBOT was surprised to see Mrs. Ruggles in the room. She had entered quietly. On seeing her, Talbot thought that she had come for the express purpose of resigning her position as housekeeper. No doubt she was another who did not wish to live in the same house with a disgraced man! What would the gossips say about her if she continued with a man who had been accused of murder?

Oh, it was only their way. A puritanical pride was the mainspring of their actions, but in his soul, he could not blame the woman if, under the circumstances, she wished to go.

Gloomily he looked at Mrs. Ruggles who seemed confused and embarrassed.

"I think I know what you wish to tell me, Mrs. Ruggles," he said. "I see it is hard for you to tell me. Of course you have been with me a few years, but after all, you are quite right.

"You cannot help what people say and struggle against the stream. That is the way of the world. No apologies — I find no fault — if others do it, why not you?"

Open-mouthed, she stared at Victor. How strange his voice sounded; how his eyes flamed! What did he mean? She could not make him out.

"Mr. Talbot, I—I——." she cried.

"No, Mrs. Ruggles, do not trouble yourself with apologies," he broke in. "As things stand, it is best for you to go. Warner is going too; but of course you will stay until I come back."

At last the old woman saw light. Throwing one hand into the other before her, she said:

"But Mr. Talbot, why do you talk of my leaving? I have not even dreamt of such a thing, unless you want to send me away and get a younger woman. Why should

I want to go? I have always been satisfied here and you have always been so kind."

A secret satisfaction flitted over Talbot's face, but soon bitterness won the upper hand.

"But Mrs. Ruggles," he said. "I cannot accept such a sacrifice. What will people say if you stay in my house? The people in the village would lose all respect for you."

Tears of sympathy came to the old woman's eyes. She had had a deep look into her master's troubled soul. She saw what he thought when she came in.

"How could you think me so bad and unfaithful," she sobbed. "You know how much I am attached to you. You must not mind Warner. I always knew he was not truly grateful for all you did for him.

"I have never forgotten what a good man you are, and that you could never be wicked enough to kill any one. I believe in you as I believe in heaven itself; and if I am not too old, and if you don't drive me away, I will stay so long—so long—until a young woman comes here as mistress who doesn't need Mrs. Ruggles!"

Talbot's face brightened wonderfully. This was a healing lotion for his heart. Such devotion was recompense for a great deal.

For a moment he could not speak, so deeply moved was he. More than once he pressed the old woman's hand and looked at her gratefully. At last he said:

"I shall never forget this, Mrs. Ruggles. After all there is one true soul in my home, and I doubted everyone. You have done me a world of good."

Here, as the dogs crowded about him again as if they, too, belonged to this newly founded company, there was a trace of a smile on his pale face.

Mrs. Ruggles dried her eyes. She could have

kissed his hands, so much was she attached to this man who, as long as she had known him, had never done a wrong.

"You have not asked me why I have come, Mr. Talbot," she began. "I must tell you. Have you ever heard from Miss Lillian?"

He shot up as if electrified!

"From her?" he cried. "No, that is to say, Mrs. Crawford visited me once in prison and told me that Lillian was visiting a friend in the south and was having a good time. She even hinted about an engagement."

"That's a lie, I do not believe it!" came from Mrs. Ruggles indignantly. "Mr. Talbot, don't believe what she told you. Oh, I have worried about the poor young girl since you have been away.

"At first she came here often, but after Mr. Lee came she did not dare to be seen here. But we met outside sometimes. Oh, I can't tell you with what love she spoke of you!

"I don't suppose her step-mother made things easy for her. I heard quite a lot from Susan who lost her place not long ago.

"She looked me up and I learned a great deal from her about Lillian. Mrs. Crawford went away with her one day, and no one knows where. But one time I got a little light on the subject.

"Susan told me that Mrs. Crawford had locked Lillian in her room so that she could not come here. Then a little later they made preparations for traveling. On the evening before, Lillian had tried to come here, but Mrs. Crawford had had all the doors locked and had the keys brought to her.

"She said Lillian cried a good deal. In the morning, she gave Susan a letter for me and asked her to deliver it. But Mrs. Crawford noticed it and while Lillian

was in the house, she made Susan give it up."

"Now I have it!" cried Talbot. "I always felt Mrs. Crawford was doing her best to drive us apart. Poor little Lillian! But did Susan find out where she went," he asked. "Mrs. Crawford has certainly written to her step-daughter."

"Of course she has," Mrs. Ruggles replied. "Susan tried to find out the address but Mrs. Crawford was always very careful to post the letters herself, so Susan found out nothing. No one knows where she has put the poor child.

"As soon as you came into the house, Mr. Talbot, I knew that you hoped to find her here, and she would have been here, depend upon it — if she was not prevented by force."

Victor's face brightened more and more. The light of hope shone from his eyes.

"I have never believed that Lillian could be untrue to me," he said as if speaking to himself. "Only in moments of greatest despair, did I have the slightest doubt, and I am ashamed of it."

The old woman left the room. She had had no peace; she felt as if she must tell her kind master her concern for Lillian and now she had the satisfaction that comes of a mission fulfilled.

Deep into the night, Talbot paced restlessly up and down his room, the excitement of the day and his worry for his betrothed, did not permit him to rest.

It was long after midnight before he attempted to lie down.

When he awoke in the morning, he seemed to be still in a dream, but no, this was home.

The sun shone brightly within the rose-trellised casements and the birds sang in the branches outside. It was as of old, but yet different.

The sun shone as with a mocking brilliance; and the song of the birds seemed discordantly gay.

Quickly he sprang up from the bed. His first thought was for Lillian. He would seek her, though he must go to the very ends of the world to find her!

What must he do to find her?

Chapter 187

DANGEROUS FRIENDSHIP

BETTY PROCTER felt that she made no mistake when she promised to marry Harold Wayne. Although she enjoyed stage work, longed for the quiet home life. She had experienced a complete change in this respect. The reason for this was the more and more obvious fact of approaching motherhood.

She had already given notice of leaving to the management, and she started making the necessary preparations for her second wedding.

Mrs. Armond gave herself credit for having brought about the match. She was very fond of Wayne and she loved Betty.

Knowing the past of these two young folk, she took it for granted that they had learned tolerance and a thorough appreciation of the more essential things in life.

"Betty will make a dandy little wife for you," she had said to Wayne. "Harold will be a good husband to you," to Betty. Both parties concerned believed, and so the wedding bells rang.

It proved to be a very quiet affair. The ceremony was performed in Mrs. Armond's cozy living room, with only a few intimate friends present.

They were indeed a handsome couple as they stood before the clergyman. And they were sublimely happy.

In Betty Procter the stage lost one of its most admired performers. Mr. Brady, her manager, sent a beautiful set of silver and he was present to wish her good

luck.

The most disappointed man in the world, perhaps, was Mr. Jamison. For a long time he had refused to believe that Betty actually contemplated a second trip upon the sea of matrimony.

Underlying his feeling of kindliness for the lovely and talented dancer was love which he had kept hidden during his late association with her.

But he was big enough to buy her a handsome gift for the occasion. Betty received it with a cry of delight, while Harold Wayne showed an inclination to frown. His suggestion to refuse it was quickly overruled by Betty.

She assured her husband that Mr. Jamison had been actuated by a feeling of friendship and nothing else. Then something entirely unexpected happened.

A few weeks after the marriage Jamison called upon Harold Wayne at the latter's place of business.

The reception he received was somewhat frigid. Wayne made it plain that he had no particular desire to be on friendly terms with the man who had financed Betty's terpsichorean studies.

But Jamison was not in the least offended. In fact he had expected something like that. He did not wait until he was asked to be seated, but reached for a chair and lit a cigar.

"Young man," he began, his voice carrying a message of kindliness that could not be misunderstood. "I came here to have a talk with you. And I am of the firm belief that we will understand each other a little better afterward."

"Well, what is it?" Wayne said rather gruffly.

"You and I have met before," the other continued, in the same kindly tone. "And although you were a somewhat unwelcome visitor the first time we met, I

liked you."

Wayne did not know what to reply, and gave a sort of a grunt.

"You distrust me, don't you?" the older man said with another smile.

"To be frank with you, yes, Mr. Jamison."

"That is what I wanted to hear," the latter returned quickly. "I think that by being absolutely frank with one another, we can come to an understanding. Now then, I'll unburden myself.

"I have a great deal to regret. You know that. But I have been trying very hard to make amends. I don't know if you ever were aware of that fact."

"Betty spoke of it," the younger man admitted. "I hope it is true."

"It is true," Mr. Jamison declared firmly. "I have made due apologies to the lady who is now your wife. I started her on a career that would have placed her in the front rank of vaudeville performers.

"Up to the time you married her she earned a salary such as is paid to only a few women on the stage in New York.

"I am still very much interested in her welfare. Now don't misunderstand me when I say that. She loves you, there can be no doubt on that score. She made a great sacrifice for you in giving up her stage career, don't forget that.

"And now that she is your wife, I don't want to be her friend alone. I want to be yours as well. I have been watching you lately. You are building up a nice business, but it could be trebled if you had the capital to put into it. I have several thousand dollars I would like to invest.

"You are honest. I'll stake you to any amount. Make me your silent partner. I'll——"

The speaker paused Into the listener's face something had come that warned him not to proceed any further, it was no use.

"You don't like the idea, Mr. Wayne," he said, disappointed.

"No, sir," was the prompt response. "But I don't want you to think that I am ungrateful. Your offer is generous enough, but I could not accept it under existing conditions. Spare me further explanations."

Jamison held out his hand.

"I am glad you said that," he announced. "You have the right stuff in you. I was only testing you, my young friend. Had you accepted it I should have been disappointed indeed. Betty made no mistake when she gave you her hand in marriage. You'll make her happy indeed."

There was something well nigh irrestible in the millionaire's manner.

Wayne was carried away by it and he grasped the hand still held out to him and pressed it warmly.

"Mr. Jamison," he said, a slight tremor in his tone. "If I have said anything that was offensive. I am very sorry."

"You have not offended me in the least, my dear young man," the other returned heartily "You have said just what I expected. After all money means so little unless one can put it to some good use.

"You are comparatively poor, yet, I freely admit that you are a better man than I am. I want to earn your friendship if I can."

"You have that already, sir." Wayne answered, his honest eyes meeting the other's unwaveringly.

"Thanks." Mr. Jamison rose and strode toward the door.

"If ever I can do anything for you don't hesitate

to come to me," he added in a voice that thrilled the listener with its sincerity. "Goodby."

"Good-by," the younger man replied. "And we shall be pleased to have you come to see us."

"I will." The door closed and the millionaire was gone.

Through the window Wayne watched him as he climbed into his car and was driven away.

That evening when he returned home, he did not say a word of Jamison's visit to Betty. He noticed, however, that she gave him an occasional sidelong glance. She seemed to be trying to read what was going on behind his wrinkled brow.

While his distrust of Mr. Jamison had been allayed, still, he disliked the idea of discussing the man with his wife.

During the days which followed, Betty happened to mention her benefactor's name several times.

Each time she noticed that her husband frowned and showed a decided inclination not to answer.

One afternoon she went on a shopping tour. She had just emerged from a department store on Fifth Ave. when someone called to her.

As she gazed about curiously, her attention was attracted by a man who waved his hand frantically from an automobile standing at the curb. She recognized him at once. It was Mr. Jamison.

"Can I give you a lift, Mrs. Wayne?" he smiled.

"If you want to," she smiled back. "I want to go home."

"Very well, climb in," he opened the door for her and she took a seat beside him.

While they drove away a woman who lived in the same building where the Waynes had their flat happened to pass.

She gazed after the fast disappearing automobile and nodded her head.

"I suppose that is about what one can expect from these stage women," she muttered with an ugly grin. "They are all alike. It is a shame. Harold Wayne is such a nice young man, too. I wonder if he has any idea of what is going on."

She was thinking rapidly and she walked rapidly.

On her face was the expression of a woman who believed that she had discovered a terrible secret.

Women like her usually get the wrong impression because their minds are warped. They are of the type that are constantly on the lookout for some sensational bit of gossip to peddle.

No matter how harmless it may be, they put the worst possible construction on it.

Her mind was made up immediately to one thing. Betty Wayne was carrying on a secret intrigue with some rich man.

But the woman was not only doing Betty a rank injustice, but Mr. Jamison also. The relation existing between these two bore the closest scrutiny. It was a feeling of deep mutual friendship and nothing more.

As they sat close to each other in the car their conversation naturally turned to subjects interesting to them both.

"You are looking splendid, Mrs. Wayne," he was saying. "I hope you are perfectly happy."

The smile she gave him was not absolutely carefree.

"I might be perfectly happy if it were not for one thing," Betty answered, a little sigh slipping over her lips.

"What is that?"

"My husband, I am afraid, shows symptoms of be-

ing jealous, Mr. Jamison. I have tried to reason with him a number of times. He would have a fit if he knew that you are bringing me home in your machine."

Jamison's brow clouded.

"I am indeed sorry to hear that," he declared. "God knows he has no reason to be jealous of me. I want to be his friend as well as yours."

"I know you do, Mr. Jamison."

For a full minute neither spoke again.

"He must be cured of that, if your married life is to be a happy one," the millionaire said presently. "And I could not bear to see you unhappy. There isn't a thing I would not do for both of you, Mrs. Wayne."

"You have been more than kind to us," she murmured, a pretty blush creeping into her cheeks.

His eyes wandered over her girlish figure and rested on her face.

Had he given expression to the feeling that dwelled in his heart, Harold Wayne might have had real cause for jealousy. He loved her and tried hard not to show it.

When he addressed her again his voice was singularly soft.

"You must not lose patience with your husband," he exhorted. "He is young and loves you dearly."

A tear crept into Betty's eyes. She hastily wiped it away.

Before she could speak the automobile had come to a stop. As she looked up she noticed that they had arrived at the building which held the cozy apartment she called home.

Mr. Jamison alighted first and assisted her to the sidewalk.

"I am going to call on you and your husband some evening this week," he announced with a good-natured

laugh. "And when I come I want you to give me a chance to be alone with him for a little while."

"Gladly," she responded, smiling again. "Good by, and thank you."

The millionaire lifted his hat politely, then climbed back into the machine.

As he was driven away, Betty stood looking after him, with a strange expression in her blue eyes. She did not go in until the car was out of sight.

That night when her husband came home, he seemed to be in the best of spirits. But the moment she told him that she had met Mr. Jamison up town quite accidentally, and that he had brought her home, a sudden change came over him.

"I don't like the idea of him driving you about," he demurred.

"Why not?" she asked, disappointed.

"Because I don't like it, that's all." Wayne's voice was raised unpleasantly. "The first thing you'll have the neighbors talking about you. And you know, a woman's reputation is what her neighbors and friends think about her."

"Hang the neighbors," Betty retorted with a toss of her pretty head. "Why should you worry about them? I told you that Mr. Jamison brought me home because I want to be honest and fair with you. Perhaps it would have been better if I——"

A look in her husband's dark eyes made her stop.

"Don't you ever dare deceive me," he cried almost fiercely.

Betty stared at him, dumbfounded. It was the first time since their marriage that he showed temper.

"Listen, Harold," she said very quietly. "Don't make yourself unhappy by this unreasonable jealousy. I have not yet given you the least reason to distrust me,

have I?"

He made no answer to this, but turned away.

"Mr. Jamison is a gentleman," she went on doggedly. "I respect and honor him. No matter what his past life has been, he is alright now. You do him an injustice if you——"

"Look here," her husband interrupted angrily. "I don't want to discuss that man with you. I want him to let you alone. I don't ever want to see him again."

"But he is coming to see us some evening this week," she persisted.

He whirled on her his face white.

"You invited him. You had no right——" he paused, glaring at her.

Betty had been patient, but there was a limit. She was smarting under his rebuke and began to toy nervously with the gold locket that hung suspended from a long chain around her neck.

"I—I don't want to quarrel with you," she said, her eyes misting over with a hint of tears. "If you persist in this insane jealousy, I'll — I'll hate you."

Before Wayne could make a reply, she had left the room.

Chapter 188

MARGARET WENTWORTH

VICTOR TALBOT had but one aim in view, and that was to find Lillian Crawford without delay. There could not be another happy moment in his life until he stood once more face to face with the girl. From her own lips he wanted to hear the truth.

If she loved him no longer because of his unfortunate entanglement in the Hawkins murder case, her own lips must say so. Most of his neighbors looked upon him with ill-concealed suspicion.

First of all he intended to call on Mrs. Crawford and ask her for an explanation. He expected this woman to clear up quite a few things before he went any further.

He felt absolutely sure that she had deliberately lied to him. But he would tolerate no more trickery.

Making a determined effort to hide his fierce anger, he approached the Crawford home late in the afternoon. His prolonged ring brought one of the servants on the run.

"I would like to see Mrs. Crawford," he announced in a steady tone. "Is she at home?"

"She is not," the girl answered, giving the visitor an impudent stare. "What do you want to see her for?"

Victor paled at the reception accorded him by this servant, but he held himself under control.

"I am Mr. Talbot," he said, "and——"

"Oh, yes. I know who you are," came the painful interruption. "You are the man who was tried for mur-

dering Mr. Hawkins. Well, they let you go, didn't they? They couldn't prove your guilt and neither did they prove your innocence. Well, I don't think Mrs. Crawford would care to see you if she were home."

With that the door was slammed in Victor Talbot's face.

Trembling with rage he turned away. Again he had been given a most unpleasant reminder of what people thought of his acquittal.

He was still being regarded as a murderer unless his absolute innocence could be established.

For a moment he did not know what to do. He had come with the firm intention of compelling Mrs. Crawford to tell him where Lillian was.

And now he was not only bitterly disappointed, but had been made to swallow an insult from an ordinary servant.

"I'd like to wring that girl's neck!" he said savagely as he walked homeward with his head bowed in humiliation.

Angry and rather puzzled, he decided to make a trip to Louisville, Kentucky, where the Wentworths lived. According to the statement Mrs. Crawford had made to him that day when she visited him in prison, Lillian was staying there.

But as Victor recalled that visit, he also was reminded of the letter which the young girl was supposed to have written. He recalled that Margaret Wentworth had a handsome young brother. Further than that he was afraid to think.

Action and the desire for swift verification of the rumors and suspicions that tortured him, were the factors which drove him on. He had a short talk with Mrs. Ruggles and made hurried preparations to leave for Louisville.

"If anything should happen that demands my presence here, send me a telegram, Mrs. Ruggles," were his departing words.

The housekeeper had promised faithfully to guard her master's interest. She was the kind of a woman who never broke a promise.

With tears in her eyes she stood at the window and watched Talbot disappear.

The latter was by no means in a happy frame of mind. The Wentworths were typical Southern aristocrats and very wealthy.

Young Guy Wentworth was the kind of a chap who easily excited the admiration of the feminine sex. What if Lillian Crawford had fallen in love with him?

The thought made his heart miss a beat. Most of the time during the trip he spent in the smoking car where with a consoling cigar he tried very hard to retain at least a remnant of his optimism.

It was about the middle of the afternoon when he arrived in Louisville. At the station he engaged a taxi and proceeded to the Wentworth residence.

The stately old Southern mansion stood on an elevation which overlooked the Ohio river.

Spacious grounds and flowers and shrubbery provided the proper setting. Talbot fought off the sudden fear that rushed over him, and approached the massive front entrance.

Before he had a chance to ring the bell, the door was opened, and a neatly dressed maid appeared.

"I—I wish to see Miss Margaret Wentworth," Talbot said, taking off his hat.

"Miss Margaret is not at home just now, sir," the girl smiled pleasantly. "She has gone for a ride. But I think she'll be back in a little while. Won't you come in and wait?"

"Yes, I'll wait," the visitor replied.

He was ushered into a magnificently furnished reception room. The maid pointed to a chair, smiling again, and vanished.

Somewhat embarrassed, Talbot took a seat. In comparison with the tasteful elegance which surrounded him, his own house seemed almost bare.

He saw himself repeatedly in the glass panels which lined the walls with all their faint green satin surroundings, and he felt somewhat out-of-place.

His thoughts were like the circlets one sees in a dark pool, continually dying out and continually started again by some impulse below the surface.

The central impulse came from the image of Lillian which recurred again and again to his mind.

Would Lillian, who also was accustomed to rather a luxurious life, be ever at home in his plain abode?

His eyes roved about the room. On a small tabouret which stood alongside of his arm chair, there were a number of photographs. He could have shouted in his pleasure at seeing Lillian's pure features on one of them.

This picture he had never before seen. It had been taken together with Margaret Wentworth on a former visit. In a transport of delight he took it up and absorbed himself in admiration of her pretty, delicate face.

In his abstraction, he did not hear the light footsteps which came towards him, stilled by the deep-piled carpet of rich green velvet. A young girl had entered.

She was rather too thin, but with a girlishness of form; her features somewhat irregular and sallow.

Alice Wentworth was not a beauty, but whoever looked into her eyes, shining with the light of intellect and goodness of heart, felt the charm which her pres-

ence exhaled.

Although but slightly older than Lillian, Miss Wentworth was much more mature and experienced than her friend who had seldom mingled with people outside of her home.

The rustling of her dress at last woke Talbot from his ruminations.

He was a little embarrassed as he so unexpectedly saw before him Margaret Wentworth whom he recognized from the picture which he still held in his hand.

"I beg your pardon," he faltered, while a light blush colored his pale face. "I was perhaps somewhat indiscreet to take up this picture, but on it I saw the features of the face of a dear friend. I am Mr. Talbot, Miss Wentworth."

Her intellectual face seemed to brighten as with sunshine, but quickly there followed a faint expression of hesitation.

This then, was the man whom Lillian loved—for whose possession she, to a certain extent, defied fate. Yes, he was big, handsome and interesting; it could not be denied.

And besides, what an extraordinary history. Only yesterday she had read the stirring speech his defender had made in court and it had left a deep impression on her.

She could understand why Lillian loved this man: she, too, felt drawn towards him.

With winning cordiality, she returned the greeting of her guest and congratulated him on his acquittal.

Without seeming to notice the cloud which had gathered on his brow, she spoke of the outcome of the trial and how glad she was for Lillian's sake that it had happened so. Her warm, kindly words cheered him wonderfully.

Did not her voice possess something of the ring of Lillian's? Perhaps it was that, that influenced him so in her favor.

"I must tell you, Miss Wentworth, why I am intruding to-day," he began. "I have come to see Lillian."

"Here?" The eyes of the young girl opened wide in her astonishment. "Who told you, Mr. Talbot, that Lillian is here?"

"Mrs. Crawford," he answered. "During my imprisonment, she came to see me and told me that Lillian was visiting you and was having an enjoyable time here."

Margaret continued to look at him in amazement.

"But that is not true!" she said. "I do not understand how she could tell you anything of the kind. Lillian amuse herself while you were in prison! Indeed, it is too shocking!

"But this is just like Mrs. Crawford; I knew her well. She would move heaven and earth to keep you and Lillian apart."

"Then Lillian is not here?" cried Victor with a sense of relief in spite of his disappointment.

"But perhaps you can tell me where she is staying now.

"You can easily understand, Miss Wentworth, how I long to see her after this long separation. Two days ago I was at her house and found that both she and Mrs. Crawford were away."

Margaret looked at him compassionately.

"No, Mr. Talbot," she declared, "I don't know and have no idea where my friend may be. Several letters which I wrote her remained unanswered, so at last I made up my mind to write Mrs. Crawford.

"She replied that on account of ill-health, Lillian had gone south and for the time being at least, it would be best to leave her fully undisturbed, even by friendly

correspondence, as in her condition the attending physician considered it of the utmost importance to keep her away from any scenes or memories which might disturb her mind.

"She promised to write me at once on Lillian's recovery and return from the south. In other words she told me diplomatically that she did not wish me to continue correspondence with Lillian, and, therefore, did not give me her address."

Talbot listened attentively. There was little comfort in all this. He had confidently hoped to find Lillian or her whereabouts here.

"My God," he murmured in trouble, "what if she really is so ill! Her anxiety and worry about my fate must have had a terrible effect upon her."

"She has certainly suffered," nodded Margaret, but do not believe for a moment what Mrs. Crawford says. No doubt things are quite different. Mrs. Crawford never approved of Lillian's relations with you and when misfortune came, she employed the opportunity to do everything possible to part you both, and it can be only for this reason that she has sent the poor girl away; probably to a place where she cannot easily be reached or heard from. That is my opinion."

"You may be right, Miss Wentworth," Victor cried, "but what can I do to find out where she is? Mrs. Crawford, as you have said, would certainly have chosen a place which would prove very difficult to discover."

Margaret Wentworth remained in silent thoughtfulness for a moment. Finally she said:

"There can be no question about that. I think it would be best for you to try to learn where Mrs. Crawford herself has gone. Her sudden disappearance is surely connected with your acquittal.

"She knows you will search for Lillian, and she

probably intends to take her in her own charge.

"I have often wondered why she has always so strongly objected to your marriage with Lillian. Lillian told me that it was on account of a question of social rank, but I cannot believe it.

"Her father might have advanced such a reason with some justice, although I am sure he was too broad-minded a man to do so, and would judge a man on his own merits. But Mrs. Crawford herself, is certainly not of aristocratic extraction, nor was her social station an enviable one before she married Mr. Crawford.

"Then, too, she is still in the best time of life and I do not think that her mourning for Mr. Crawford is so deep that she would not permit herself to be consoled by another man for her loss.

"In this case, however, Lillian would be in her way, for in spite of her own attractions, she would be put into the shade in comparison with Lillian. It is reasonable to suppose that she would gladly use any opportunity to remove Lillian from her path.

"But you were courting Lillian herself; this reasoning hardly applies and so she must have other grounds which must be very weighty with her for her objections to your union with Lillian. But, as I have said, I have no idea what her motives may be."

While Miss Wentworth was speaking, Talbot was not a little startled by the train of thought she was following, for it seemed to him as if she had guessed the true reason for Mrs. Crawford's actions.

He was greatly relieved when he saw that this was not the case, and as she paused, he replied:

"It is quite true that Mrs. Crawford told me that she objected on account of the difference in our social station. If she had any other reason, I am unable to explain why she has kept the secret.

"However, as she was favorable to Roger Hawkins' proposal, that may have been the cause of her opposition to my courtship."

It was characteristic of Victor Talbot that he did not even hint to Margaret the real cause of Mrs. Crawford's actions.

"Depend upon it, Miss Wentworth," he went on, "I shall not desist in my efforts — I will find Lillian wherever she may be. And if what we are assuming should be the case, I give you my word, I will be deterred by no consideration for her step-mother, and I will not rest until she is deprived of Lillian's guardianship."

Miss Wentworth's eyes rested with admiration on him. To her he seemed a true hero.

Society had long wondered why this attractive, wealthy girl had never allowed herself to be captured by any of her many courtiers.

If she had met a man like Talbot, to whom she looked up in admiration; whose simple, upright character and manly energy showed in his very movements and distinguished him from the gallants and parlor knights, she would certainly have surrendered both her heart and hand.

She was a clear-seeing girl with instinctively correct impressions, and had never met a man whose entire character was suited to hers.

Talbot, himself, was greatly attracted by her. The very fact that she was such a true, loving friend of Lillian's, doubled her worth in his estimation.

She invited him to stay for dinner, but Victor declined. His heart was too full of care for Lillian to render him pleasant company.

In taking leave, he looked full into her clear eyes.

"As soon as I have found a trace of Lillian," he told her, "I will inform you; and if my great hope is real-

lized and Lillian becomes my wife, will you make us happy by a visit to my home?"

"Surely I will come, you have my word—and I hope I may be soon called upon to make it good," she returned smilingly.

"Another favor, Miss Wentworth," he said. "Have you another picture of yourself and Lillian, and will you give it to me as a souvenir of our first meeting?"

Margaret blushed with pleasure. "With all my heart," she said, and brought one out from a drawer in her desk.

Talbot received it with shining eyes, and gallantly kissed the hand which presented it, in gratitude.

When he had gone, Margaret Wentworth slipped into a chair at her desk and thoughtfully held her head in her hand.

"Lucky Lillian," she murmured. "In spite of all your trouble, I could almost envy you on account of this man. No, never could he have done that deed, and though the whole world condemned him, I could hold true to him, for such eyes cannot lie!"

Meantime, the subject of her thoughts was on his way to the railroad station to take a return train for home.

For only there, he had made up his mind, could he hope to discover the place of Lillian's sojourn, or the goal of Mrs. Crawford's journey.

As he was about to ascend the steps leading to the platform, he heard himself called by name and, turning, he saw a man hastening towards him.

Talbot recognized him as he came near. It was an old fellow-student in forestry who had not, however, finished his course, but had eventually studied law and was now a member of the bar.

"What brings you down here, Merwin?" Talbot

greeted him in agreeable surprise. "On your last visit you told me you were settling down in Oklahoma."

"Nothing has come of it, my dear fellow," interrupted Merwin laughing, "and I haven't lost any sleep about it either. To be frank with you, I prefer life here in the effete East to that of the "wild and woolly" West.

"But you, Victor, what are you doing here? While I think of it—I saw a neighbor of yours in Cincinnati two days ago—an attractive widow—Mrs. Crawford!"

Talbot could not repress a start of surprise. "You don't say so! You saw her in Cincinnati? When was that, Merwin?"

"When? Why, two days ago, as I have already told you. I was going through the station and passed her at a ticket window ordering accomodations to Tampa."

"Ah!" exclaimed Victor in elation, "I call this help from above. This information, Merwin, means more to me than I can tell you. I have been searching my brain for hours for means of finding it out and here you come, as if sent by Heaven, to tell me. To Tampa! Now I can go on and finish what I set out to do!"

"What's the matter?" cried Merwin, "I don't understand a word of all that. 'Sent by Heaven', what has Mrs. Crawford to do with you?"

"Don't ask me just now, old man," replied Victor. "I could not begin to tell you all about it, but what you have told me is of the utmost value to me, and I thank you with all my heart.

"Later, perhaps, I may have an opportunity to explain matters, but excuse me, Merwin, I must get along now, or I shall be late."

He took Merwin's hand, hastily bade him goodbye, and in a moment was lost in the crowd. He left a friend with a puzzled expression on his face.

His plans were entirely changed. An hour later,

he was seated in a train bound for Tampa.

In the meantime, he had written a few lines to Margaret Wentworth telling her what he had learned, and that he was following on the track of Mrs. Crawford immediately.

Although he was on an express train, the journey seemed to last an eternity. His thoughts hurried onward to Lillian.

He prepared himself for a hard struggle with Mrs. Crawford and was determined now to meet her and defeat her opposition at any cost.

In the bitterness which he now felt towards this woman, he quite forgot that once he had sympathized with her in her hopeless passion for him.

At last he arrived at Tampa. His next task was to learn the location of Mrs. Crawford's establishment, and for this purpose he went to the post office.

To his great disappointment, he found that Mrs. Crawford's name was entirely unknown. The clerks thought she could not yet have settled in the district.

Talbot stood pondering over his next step when, to his astonishment, he heard the name, "Marie Desmond," called from one of the windows.

Not far from the window at which he was standing, there were seated two clerks, one of whom had a number of letters and other pieces of mail before him from which he was reading the addresses, and the other seemed to be entering them on a list.

It seemed to Talbot that this must be registered mail and that some of it was directed to "Marie Desmond."

How did she come here? Had she taken a place hereabouts, or was it perhaps not the "Marie Desmond" who had been at Oak Manor, and who had attended Phil Gordon at his home?

It seemed odd to hear her name here, and he felt impelled to make certain. Something in the coincidence raised a hope that she might be able to help him.

"I beg your pardon," he said, addressing the clerk at his window. "I have just heard a name called which is that of an acquaintance. Is it asking you too much to give me the address of Miss Marie Desmond, for whom there is a registered letter here?"

The clerk referred to the list and read out, "Miss Marie Desmond, Belvidere, Tampa."

Talbot made a notation of the address, thanked the clerk, and walked out.

Calling a taxi, he was driving in less than an hour to Belvidere, which he found was a little suburb consisting of a comparatively small number of country houses and their grounds.

After repeated inquiries at a group of tradesmen's houses at one end of the suburb, which was called "the village", he finally learned at which of these houses Miss Desmond lived. In a short while he stood before the pretty little cottage, but noticed at once that the shades were drawn and the house seemed deserted.

He felt a little uneasy. He rang several times, but no one came to the door; the house was certainly unoccupied. Talbot now determined to go to the nearest house which lay at some distance from the cottage and see what more he could learn.

An elderly lady answered the bell, and he asked her if a Marie Desmond had lived in the little cottage beyond.

"Yes, sir," was the answer. "Miss Desmond lived there with a young lady who was very pale and seemed ill. This young lady," she continued garrulously, "never went out, but sometimes she sat on the veranda. She seemed very ill indeed.

"Early this morning the older woman came to me and brought me the keys to the cottage. She told me that she was called away suddenly and asked me to give the keys to the owner when he came for them. I asked her if she would return, but she said no. She seemed to be in a great hurry."

Taking a long breath, the gossip resumed:

"Later on in the morning I had to go to the village and so passed the cottage. The girl who had been hired to do the work was standing at the door, crying.

"I asked her what had happened, and she told me that a very fine lady had come the night before and had taken Miss Lillian—so she called the young lady—with her but she did not know where. The other lady, that is, Miss Desmond, did not go with them. The girl had had a nice place at the cottage and was sorry to lose it. That was why she was crying."

Talbot had now heard a great many details but was in great perplexity.

That the "fine lady" who had taken away the younger one who looked so ill, was Mrs. Crawford, and that the other was Lillian, he had no doubt.

But Marie Desmond! In what relations had she stood to the two?

The description which he got from the old woman made it certain that there was not only a similarity in name, but that it was the very Marie Desmond whom he had known—the governess of Philip Gordon's children.

Yet, it seemed almost impossible. Could the ex-governess have stooped to such services? He was in a dilemma. And where had Mrs. Crawford gone with Lillian? Obstacle upon obstacle!

He had come to Tampa, confident of finding his love; he had come but a few hours too late and now stood before locked doors!

As a last resort he determined, if possible, to find the maid who had been left behind. At the direction of his informant, he proceeded to find her.

His errand took him past the cottage again. Musing, he looked up at the closed windows.

It was here, then, that she had lived, so far from home and far from him! An unbearable heartache suddenly seized upon him. He had been told that Lillian was ill.

Grimly he clenched his hands. Mrs. Crawford was the root of all this trouble; her jealousy had transformed her into a monster of cruelty! The fate of Lillian seemed in the clutches of this demon, and she could not long endure if he did not come to the rescue.

His only chance now seemed to depend on the maid. If he failed to find a clue from her, he knew not what next to do!

Chapter 189

THE GREEN MONSTER

ONE SINGLE bad trait in a man, if not conquered, will overshadow all the good ones and make him its slave. This was singularly true in the case of Harold Wayne. He had all the required qualifications and characteristics that might have raised him high above the ordinary mortal, had it not been for his insane, and wholly unreasonable jealousy, which turned him into another man.

It dominated his entire being to such an extent that it affected his business in no small degree. It had made him a disagreeable man to deal with because jealousy made him ill-tempered.

Constant worry about his wife's movements when he was away from home had a very demoralizing effect.

He made many mistakes because of absentmindedness and flew into a rage when his attention was called to these unpleasant facts.

That his best customers should forsake him was quite natural. They preferred to deal with his more agreeable competitors.

And instead of making an earnest effort to correct this glaring fault, Wayne, obstinate and stubborn as he was, became deeper and deeper involved in quarrels that assumed serious aspect.

He became surly and pessimistic.

The constantly decreasing loss of desirable customers meant financial losses which came at a time when he needed ready cash most. The stork was soon coming.

Continued in next number

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